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ABSTRACT

With a national goal announced as "ending welfare as we know it," it is necessary to discuss questions regarding targeting, sanctions and incentives, service delivery, and success criteria for adult literacy programs that attempt to train low-literate adults for jobs. At present, there are about 14-15 million recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), two-thirds of them being children. Total expenditures for benefits in 1992 were more than $22 billion. More than half of the 4.6 million parents on AFDC are under 30 years old, with 8 percent under 20 years old. Approximately two-thirds of welfare recipients collect assistance for less than 2 years at a time, using it as a transition through hard times. As a group, welfare recipients have significantly lower educational attainment and achievement than the general adult population, with nearly half having less than a high school diploma; 40 percent of welfare recipients in a national survey of adult education programs possessed skills below the high school entry level. Approximately 70 percent of welfare recipients are concentrated in the two lowest literacy levels. Like other adult literacy students, AFDC recipients who enroll in adult literacy classes often have negative prior school experiences, learning disabilities, low self-esteem, and little confidence in their capacity to learn. In order to formulate policies to reform welfare, answers to the following questions must be sought: What should the goals of adult literacy and basic skills programs for welfare recipients be? What performance standards should be developed for the literacy and basic skills components of welfare-to-work programs? What is known about successful strategies for welfare-to-work programs? How should resources be targeted? and What are the policy and legislative implications of these recommendations? (Contains 14 references.) (KC)

ED 372 279

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR LITERACY

WHAT KIND OF ADULT LITERACY POLICY DO WE NEED IF WE ARE SERIOUS ABOUT ENDING WELFARE AS WE KNOW IT?

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This summary paper was prepared by staff of the National Institute for Literacy to serve as a stimulus for discussion among participants at a policy forum on Achieving the National Education Goal on Adult Literacy to be held on June 23-24, 1994 at the Westin ANA Hotel in Washington,D.C. This forum is jointly sponsored by the National Institute for Literacy, the National Education Goals Panel and the National Governors Association.

The forum will engage policymakers, researchers, practitioners and citizens in serious and creative discussion of the ideas raised in a set of papers commissioned by the National Education Goals Panel and the National Institute for Literacy. In these papers researchers were asked to examine the significance of the findings of the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) for achieving critical national policy goals including the adult literacy and life long learning goal of the National Education Goals. A volume of the complete set of papers will be published in late 1994.

In preparing summary papers for this forum, NIFL staff have drawn on the commissioned papers and on discussions with their authors. We have placed their research findings in a uniform framework that includes a series of key questions to be addressed by forum participants.

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WHAT KIND OF ADULT LITERACY POLICY DO WE NEED IF WE ARE SERIOUS ABOUT ENDING WELFARE AS WE KNOW IT?

INTRODUCTION

The Clinton Administration has put forward a set of proposals aimed at "ending welfare as we know it." A much-publicized element of this plan is a two-year time limit on cash assistance and a greater emphasis on "promoting self-sufficiency through access to education and training." The goal is to assure that by the end of two years adult recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) have the skills, knowledge and resources necessary to achieve self-support and find work in the private sector. Those unable to find private sector jobs will be supported via community service jobs.

These proposals have given rise to energetic debate within Congress and across the country. While there is widespread agreement with the goal of ending welfare as we know it, there is equally widespread debate about what should replace it -- a debate that reflects varying beliefs about why families come to depend on cash assistance for support in the first place.

This most recent national debate follows more than a decade of widespread experimentation with welfare reform and four years of experience in implementing the 1988 Family Support Act (FSA). FSA attempted to codify the learnings from the earlier period of experimentation. FSA's centerpiece -- the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training Program (JOBS) -- is based on two major assumptions: (1) that it is the responsibility of parents to support their families and of government to assist them in gaining the skills and resources necessary to fulfill that responsibility, and (2) that a strong foundation of literacy and basic skills is critical to the successful transition to employment and self-sufficiency for AFDC parents -- especially young parents.

While JOBS remains the core of most current welfare reform proposals, the differences among them reflect the variety of interpretations of the most effective way to implement JOBS. Of particular interest to those involved with adult literacy and basic skills policy are questions regarding:

- **targeting**: which sub groups within the AFDC population should be targeted for participation in JOBS?
- **sanctions and incentives**: what are the best ways to assure participation in JOBS? what is the impact of making participation in literacy and basic skills programs mandatory?
- **service delivery**: what is the role of adult literacy and basic skills program services in helping families move off AFDC? where do these services "fit" in the transitional process? Should they be offered as the first step in a sequence of services intended to lead to employment? integrated with job-specific training? offered as a supplement to placement in private sector employment?

- **success**: what should the goal of adult literacy and basic skills programs be for adult AFDC recipients? what do we know about service delivery strategies that are most effective at reaching these goals?

Our answers to these questions are especially important, given a constrained fiscal environment for state and federal budgets. Policymakers in every state will have to make choices about the most effective use of combined public and private, federal, state and local resources to achieve our shared national goal of welfare reform **and** human capital development.

The purpose of this Policy Forum is to generate creative and thoughtful discussion among policymakers, practitioners, researchers and citizens about what we can do as a nation to put in place a system that helps adults dependent on the welfare system develop the skills and knowledge necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

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I. WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT WELFARE RECIPIENTS?

A. Demographics of the Welfare Population

Estimates of the current number of recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children hover between 14 and 15 million. Two-thirds of this number are children. Total expenditures for benefits in 1992 -- when there were 13.6 million recipients -- exceeded $22 billion. The Federal share was about $13 billion, or 1% of the federal budget. States paid the remaining costs.

The 4.6 million parents on AFDC are, on the whole, a young population. Eight percent are currently under twenty -- the definition of teen parents. More than 50% are under 30. They are all races: 39% are African-American, 38% White, 17% Hispanic. (Martinson)

According to Mark Greenberg of the Center for Law and Social Policy. there is "no good long-term data on how people use AFDC, why they exit or do not exit, what happens when they exit, why they do or do not return, what happens when they go to work." Most of the existing data focuses on discrete periods of continuous receipt of AFDC -- what are called "spells" -- rather than cumulative time on welfare rolls. While only a very small percentage of AFDC recipients -- approximately 15% -- receive continuous assistance for eight or more years, many more are on and off the rolls for briefer "spells."

Approximately two-thirds of welfare recipients collect cash assistance for less than 2 years at a spell, using it as a kind of transition through hard times. Approximately 50% of this population return at some point over the next five years, during another period of unemployment or hard times. (Greenberg) Existing data suggests that those who first collect welfare as teen parents, have very young children, are single parents, are members of a minority group, have less than a high school diploma, and have little to no work experience are more likely to spend more time on welfare. (Martinson)

B. Educational Attainment and Skills of Welfare Recipients

As a group, welfare recipients have significantly lower educational attainment and achievement than the general adult population.

- Nearly 50% of welfare recipients have less than a high school diploma, as compared with 27% of the general adult population.
- 40% of the welfare recipients included in Development Associates' survey of adult education students and programs possessed skills below the high school entry level.
- 70% of welfare recipients in the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) sample are concentrated at the two lowest literacy levels on all three NALS scales -- prose, document and quantitative literacy. They scored an average of 30 points - one level -- lower than the national average.
- Nearly 15% of NALS respondents who reported having a learning disability also reported receiving public assistance.

The NALS data underline the significance of low educational attainment and skills for "ending welfare as we know it." The data show a consistent and strong correlation -- regardless of race, ethnicity and gender -- between how well an adult scored on the three NALS scales and how well he or she is likely to do in the labor market.

Adults who scored highest on the scales are most likely to have worked the most number of weeks in the preceding year and to have the highest hourly and weekly wage, the highest household income, and the lowest welfare receipt. Conversely, those who scored at the two lowest levels are the most likely to experience unemployment, employment at a low wage, and household income significantly below the poverty level.

Since 70% of AFDC recipients scored at these two lowest levels, it is highly likely that, in the words of Pat Rickard of California's GAIN program, "[they] are ill-equipped to enter the world of work and will require long-term participation in education to attain the skill levels needed to obtain employment."

This correlation between skills level and earnings is confirmed by five year follow-up data from Mathematica's evaluation of the San Jose Center for Employment Training (CET), as well as by data from a three year follow-up study of welfare recipients who participated in Oregon's *New JOBS* program in the 80's.

The chart below presents average reading and math scale scores on BASIS (Oregon's version of the CASAS) and average annual wages by degree level for those enrollees (regardless of participation in any particular services) who were working in each of the three follow up years.

Income over Time by Education and Skill Level

Education	BASIS Reading Score	BASIS Math Score	Year 1 (10/87–9/88)	Year 2 (10/88–9/89)	Year 3 (10/89–9/90)
no degree	234.9	217.0	$3,034	$4,072	$5,839
GED	243.8	229.4	$3,104	$4,617	$6,126
high school diploma	244.1	229.7	$3,788	$5,243	$7,358
Associate's degree	247.5	237.4	$3,982	$7,762	$9,932

The most striking feature of the follow-up data presented here is that, while there is little difference between participants in the first year of follow up, the difference in earning capacity by score and education level becomes marked over time. (Hughes)

C. Life Circumstances that Impact Service Delivery

AFDC recipients who enroll in adult literacy, basic skills or GED programs share important characteristics with other adult literacy students. Many tend to have negative experiences with prior schooling and education. A significant percentage may have a history of learning disabilities. They may have low self-esteem and little confidence in their capacity to learn.

Like other parents enrolled in adult literacy programs, AFDC recipients are faced with competing demands on their time and attention. A study of black and white low-income female headed households conducted in the early 80's found that members of these households experienced four times as many life events requiring change and readjustment than other individuals. In these households, events such as loss of housing due to fire or eviction, family illness, unsafe housing conditions, domestic violence and neighborhood crime and violence occur on the average of once every two months, upsetting family stability and often interfering with efforts to persist in adult literacy programs.

AFDC/JOBS recipients differ from other adult learners, however, in at least one important way: they come as mandatory rather than voluntary learners. As a result, they may lack the motivation to persist that voluntary learners bring.

HHS's recent release of "Selected Characteristics for 1992 JOBS Participants" reveals that, of the 510,000 monthly participants in JOBS, 24.5% were enrolled in literacy, basic skills or GED services. This is the highest percent enrolled in any JOBS-related service. We know little about the circumstances that led to basic skills placement for these adults -- what choices they had, whether they had been enrolled in another service previously, what the job market is like in their locality. Nor do we know what impact a time limit might have on participation rates.

We know just as little about the services JOBS participants are enrolled in, other than that programs must meet the 20-hour per week participation criterion. We have no information on important program factors such as --

- how services are funded (i.e., through JOBS, ABA, JTPA, state sources),
- what mix of education, job readiness and counseling is included,
- what support services are provided,
- how well they prepare enrollees for successful transition off welfare.

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"To be successful in [increasing the literacy and credential receipt of welfare recipients] welfare-to-work programs must make a focused, specific, and concerted effort to improve the literacy levels of welfare recipients. Achieving results requires strenuous efforts to identify, implement, and maintain effective program practices.

-- Karen Martinson, MDRC

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II. WHAT POLICIES AND RESOURCES ARE NECESSARY TO "END WELFARE AS WE KNOW IT" AND MEET THE HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN DEPENDENT ON WELFARE?

A. What should the goals of adult literacy and basic skills programs for welfare recipients be?

1. What do welfare recipients need to know and be able to do to qualify for and find private sector jobs that will enable them to support their families?

3. What would the transition to this goal look like for a typical welfare recipient?

   a. What combination of services and resources is necessary to support this transition?
   b. What should the sequence of services be?
   c. Who needs to be involved in developing, communicating, monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of this transition?

B. What performance standards should be developed for the literacy and basic skills components of welfare-to-work programs?

1. How should we measure customer progress and success in the education components of welfare-to-work programs?

   a. What skills, knowledge, and abilities are important to develop and measure?

   b. What stakeholders should be involved in setting these standards?

2. What assessment approaches are available to measure progress in these areas for adults at every level of literacy development, and for ESL as well as native English speakers?

C. What do we know about successful strategies for welfare-to-work programs?

1. Recent evaluations of welfare reform programs suggest several factors that are associated with retention, achievement of skills gains, and attainment of credentials. These are:

   a. **The need to set clear goals.** Data from the MDRC evaluation of GAIN reveal that the most successful programs were those that were clearest about their program goals and that oriented all program elements toward achieving those goals.

   b. **The need for interagency collaboration and coordination of services at the local and state level.** "Counties that have established strong collaboration among social service, education, and job training agencies in the planning and implementation of GAIN have been successful in establishing specific program standards and outcomes focused on the needs of the GAIN participant and in identifying basic skills needs in relation to specific employment goals." (Rickard)

   c.. **The need to develop service strategies that are specifically customized to address the special needs and circumstances of welfare recipients.** "GAIN counties where adults showed gains in skills or attained credentials included close attendance monitoring and quick follow-up to resolve attendance problems, counseling to "buffer" welfare recipients' transition to school and to support them while they are in school, and special accommodations for slower learners and those at lowest literacy levels.... [In addition, GAIN data show that] programs must recognize and respond to the ultimate issue facing this population -- the need for employment and self-sufficiency. Welfare recipients are likely to become more engaged in education programs and find the programs more valuable if the services are directly related to their goals...In addition, more attention needs to be paid to efforts to link education to subsequent employment." (Martinson)

   d. **The value of integrating adult basic skills education with job specific training, rather than following the typical pattern of separate and sequenced components.** According to the Mathematica evaluation of the Minority Female Single Parent demonstration, students at the Center for Employment Training (CET) showed significant increases in average monthly earnings, average hourly earnings, and the percentage employed in year 3 of the 30-month follow-up. The CET model provides open-access, integrated training based on competencies required by employers for particular jobs in occupations in high demand.

Taking these factors into consideration, what innovations in service delivery do you know of that might support welfare recipients in their transition to self-sufficiency? Where are they being implemented?

2. What do we know about the impact of learning disabilities that can help us structure programs more effectively to meet the needs of adults with LD?

3. What recommendations should we make about program quality for welfare-to-work programs?

   a. Do we know enough about what works to endorse a particular approach to service delivery?

   b. Given the linguistic and cultural diversity of the welfare population, what variables do we need to take into account in defining program quality?

4. What kind of staff development will assure that welfare caseworkers, education providers, job developers and other key staff involved in the welfare-to-work transition are best prepared to facilitate the successful transition of welfare recipients to work?

D. Targeting and Resources

1. Given limited state and federal budgets how do we make best use of the resources available for education and training?

   a. what strategies exist for effectively targeting existing adult literacy and basic skills resources from all sources?

   b. Does it make sense to target a specific group or groups for service? Who are the likely candidates? What are the pluses and minuses of this strategy?

   c. What are the trade-offs between serving a large number of participants in less intensive services and serving a smaller number in higher-cost, intensive programs that are likely to increase participants' earning potential?

   d. What new approaches to service delivery might enable us to expand program capacity without large infusions of funding? For instance, how can we use technology to expand the traditional classroom to include the neighborhood and the community? How might we deliver functional competency-based learning into homes, enabling us to overcome costs and constraints like child care and transportation?

2. What resources and partnerships will enable us to address other needs that relate to whether welfare recipients can participate in basic skills instruction? For instance, how can we meet the need for low-cost quality child care?

3. What other resources are available for meeting education and training needs?

   a. What kind of partnerships with employers can assure that learning and skills development continue once people find employment?

   b. What legislative and other strategies might provide incentives to the private sector to support job-specific education and training on the job?

E. What are the policy and legislative implications of these recommendations?

1. How do the recommendations affect proposals for welfare reform?

2. What impact do they have in preparing for reauthorization of the Adult Education Act?

3. Are there other legislative or administrative actions that might be affected by these proposals?

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